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CPYRGHT

KUOMINTANG GRIP ON FORMOSA

From Our Tokyo Correspondent

One of the ironies of the Formosa crisis is that both the United States and China have been indulging in refinements of "brinkmanship" over the offshore islands which, in the opinion of experts, have no military or strategic value. They cannot be adequately defended against a prolonged blockade, unless the war is carried on to the mainland; they are not a springboard for an invasion which the Nationalists, in any case, are incapable of launching unaided; and their value against shipping in and out of Amoy and Foochow is questionable, save as a thorn in the flesh of the Peking regime. For the Communists, on the other hand, there can be no gain whatever in seizing positions a few miles off their shores if their ultimate objective is to have Formosa.

The issue is one of politics, not of strategy. The islands are footholds—or rather toeholds—in enemy territory, the tangible expression of the Nationalists' unshaken resolve to reconquer the mainland some day. To abandon them or lose them in combat would rob the myth of a reconquest of the value it still holds.

Any weakening of the back-to-the-mainland philosophy, whether through a cease fire, neutralization, or loss of territory, would strengthen the concept of two Chinas, which is anathema to both. Apart from the Generalissimo himself, very few of his followers, in their heart of hearts, really believe a return to the mainland possible or likely. But it is the very *raison d'être* of the Kuomintang, its ultimate justification, to which all must pay at least lip service.

HUGE ARMY

Once it is discarded, what becomes of the whole apparatus of government geared to a country not of 10 million like Formosa but of 600 million Chinese, maintained alongside of, but distinct from, the provincial administration of Taiwan? Where is the necessity for a huge army of 400,000, training and exercising unrelentingly for the great trial of strength? The burdensome bureaucracy, the military budget which absorbs some 85 per cent. of the national revenue, the strict police and security measures, the one-party dictatorship and the effective domination of eight million native Formosans by two million Chinese exiles would no longer make any sense. Even the plea that all this is needed to preserve Formosa itself from the Communists does not carry conviction. For no one on the island really believes that it is threatened in the current dispute. In any case, the United States and the 7th Fleet would ensure protection far more effectively than the Kuomintang.

Officially then, Formosa remains dedicated—sacrificed, some natives would say—to the reconquest of China proper. But the Nationalist administration has settled down, and grown local roots. More vigorous attempts were made to placate the native population, once it became obvious that cohabitation would be prolonged. In the past few years more Formosans have been brought into the Civil Service. Some

have risen to the rank of heads of departments. They have had a better break in business and industry. The Vice-President of the National Assembly, the Mayor of Taipei, and two Ministers of State in the new Cabinet of Chen Cheng are native Formosans. And, more important, some 30 per cent. of the armed forces is recruited among the islanders. There are more Formosan officers, and of higher rank, than in the past.

STRICT INDOCTRINATION

The mainstays of power, and the key posts in the Administration and the forces, however, remain firmly as ever in the hands of the Kuomintang. The Formosan recruits in the Army undergo a strict process of indoctrination during their two years' basic training. They are scattered throughout the forces, and usually commanded by officers from the mainland. The corps of political officers, attached to all units down to companies, is entrusted with the task of keeping up enthusiasm and keeping out subversive ideas. They were organized with great efficiency, on the model of the Soviet Communists, by the Generalissimo's eldest son, General Chiang Ching Kuo, who has made psychological warfare his particular concern. The system is effective. Even on Quemoy, where half the men are Formosan, morale is high. They may feel little stake in the offshore islands, and even less inspiration in the refusal to the mainland—since their own homes are in Formosa. But they will fight with a will.

Fundamentally, therefore, the regime has not changed. But its methods have softened, and its manifestations are subtler. In essentials it is still a dictatorship; but the dictatorship of a party rather than of one man. In recent years the Generalissimo has become a more shadowy, withdrawn figure, both above and beyond the fray. He infuses the whole regime with his faith and personality, and holds it together. He is the source of all power, but its effective exercise is more and more in the hands of Chen Cheng, his most likely heir, who heads the most powerful Government of the Kuomintang's 10 years of exile.

FREEDOM OF PRESS

There is the minimum of repression consistent with Kuomintang supremacy, and the pursuit of an ideal with which 80 per cent. of the population has little sympathy. Where it will jeopardize the regime or its aspirations, democracy is allowed almost free rein. At the local elections this year many Opposition candidates were elected, but the actions of mayors are subject to review by the provincial Government. The Provincial Assembly—as distinct from the Legislative Yuan—is almost entirely Formosan, but its powers are largely advisory. The Press, however, enjoys an astonishing freedom of comment, provided it does not question the personality or mission of the President, or the nature of the regime.

Economically the standard of living has risen. The population has grown,

and Taipei is bursting at the seams. The large army and the imposing bureaucracy mean higher taxes, but the necessity of war softens their impact, and reform has borne fruit: about 350,000 acres of farmland have so far been redistributed to tenants, and 90 per cent. of all farmland in the country is now owner-titled. The Government has fostered light industry to develop

exports and meet the demand for more consumer goods. A fertilizer plant is being built near Taipei, and with other similar projects under the first Four-year Plan will make Formosa almost self-sufficient in fertilizers. An oil refinery at Kaoshiung will soon give Formosa a domestic source of high octane fuel for jet aircraft.

DISCONTENT GROWING

Formosan aspirations remain as incoherent and uncoordinated as ever. Discontent with Kuomintang domination seems to have grown rather than lessened, as the necessity for it seems less justified. There is no organization, and there are no leaders to speak of—the Nationalists see to that. Politically the Formosan desire for independence constitutes no real menace to the regime so long as the Generalissimo is alive. Militarily it plays no part. The Army will follow its leaders, even though the offshore islands mean nothing to the Formosan born. What threat the Formosan national movement might be to Kuomintang supremacy is for the present neutralized by fear of Communism. Even the most ardent local patriots realize that an independent Formosa would need a powerful protector to deter their voracious Communist neighbour.

A much more immediate question is the effect of the loss of the offshore islands on the Nationalist regime. Would the Kuomintang be shaken to its foundations and lose its value as a bastion against Communism? The extent of the upheaval would depend on the manner of their fall. If by a negotiated withdrawal, it would, in the opinion of experts, be a crippling blow to the Government. If they fall after a brave fight and a strangling blockade, the wound would be grievous but not fatal. If somehow the Generalissimo could be persuaded to accept the inevitable, and persuade his followers to accept the bitter pill, he could probably still hold the country together. There would, however, be a recrudescence of anti-American feeling, and some progressive Kuomintang leaders might lend a ready ear to Communist offers of position and place. But downright defiance of any negotiated solution, determination to carry, unaided if necessary, the war into the mainland or to go under in an orgy of self-destruction, makes the imagination boggle and defies analysis.